
FRANCE MY COUNTRY

Through the Disaster

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France My Country is the first volume in the new series to be edited for Longmans, Green and Co. by Jacques Maritain and Julie Kernan.

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Through the Disaster

BY

JACQUES MARITAIN



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PREFACE

I left France in January 1940 in order to give a course, as I have been doing for the past several years, at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, and to deliver a series of lectures in the United States. I expected to return to Paris at the end of June. The tragic events of that month and the German stranglehold on my country prevented me from doing so. Having the opportunity, thanks to American hospitality, of speaking freely on many matters concerning which one must be silent in present-day France, I believe that to neglect this possibility would be to neglect my duty. These pages have been written for the American public in an effort to explain the situation to them in the best way I can. They were also written for the French public, in the sense that in writing them I have always kept present before me the friends from whom I am separated, addressing myself to them as if they could hear me. All the while, as I was writing, I was haunted by the fear lest I say a word which to them, so much nearer to events than I, might seem discord-

ant. I have taken this unavoidable risk because it seemed to me counter-balanced by the fact that we are so much better informed here than they are over there, and because I hope that the intuition of the heart may make up in some measure for physical separation, so that what I am thinking in anguish here corresponds to what they are thinking under foreign oppression there.

My only purpose has been to try to perceive and to say what is true. I have endeavoured to speak justly and objectively of things that touch my heart. I think moreover that accuracy and moderation in language are the best means of allowing the facts to speak most eloquently for themselves.

I long ago made it a rule — in the interest of my independence as a philosopher — to belong to no political group. Up to the present I have never broken this rule, and I hope never to break it. It is therefore quite independently of any partisan concern that I have set down what I believe to be the real causes of the French disaster, and what I believe to be the truth about the present situation of my country. I do not pretend to have given a complete description of all the causes of the disaster, but have

endeavoured to bring out the principal ones. As for the events which are at present taking place, they are so unpredictable and change so rapidly that the present situation may be radically modified in the interval between the writing of these pages and their appearance in print. At least, they will stand as one testimonial.

NEW YORK, *November 21, 1940*

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I

FRANCE IN HUMILIATION

The task of trying to explain the disaster that has befallen one's country is a cruel one. Indeed, we are not yet aware of the full extent of our misfortune.

More than ever France seems like a living person, precious in body and soul, precious to the world, full of promise and gifts, of beauty and gentleness; now wounded, crushed, unspeakably humiliated. She is just beginning now to realize what has happened to her; too reasonable and well-balanced, she only now begins to grasp the abomination.

How did it fall, this city of our hopes, this country that taught liberty to the world? How! like the fir-trees and the oaks of Zacharias, ye forests, fountains, hills, beautiful fields of my country. . . Yet is it not the darkest sign of all that, though crushed by apocalyptic evils, the French see no prophet arise among them to voice the horror of what has occurred and stir the spirit to its depths? This same absence

strikes us among the Jews in whom, though they are persecuted throughout the world, the spirit of prophecy remains lifeless. Meanwhile the hypnotizers of nations work their false miracles. . . Nevertheless it is true that the deep instinct of the people, when it wakens in distress, has a discernment which makes up for many deficiencies.

* * *

If we attempt to glean the truth of what has happened from the news received here, from the various articles published by trustworthy men, from conversations with Frenchmen recently arrived in America, we see that the reasons for our disaster multiply infinitely in every direction. The tragedy lies in the fact that all kinds of independent causes converged in the end on a single effect, which spelled catastrophe. The military breakdown of France undoubtedly was due to the crushing technical superiority of German armament and to numbers; but as to the first type of superiority, this was due to our own mistakes, for it was up to us to be in a position to meet Germany if not with an equally numerous army at least with an adequate armament. And

the breakdown of France was due also to strictly military mistakes in which France and England both played their part; it sprang also from a general bankruptcy of the governing clique, of party chiefs, of the leaders of the ruling classes; finally it was accompanied by a mass of inexorable psychological circumstances in which a people, politically demoralized though still retaining all its natural virtues, found itself enmeshed. Why did this whole series of unrelated causes suddenly conspire to produce the unprecedented humiliation of a great nation? Something cracked in the lower strata of the earth at a very deep point; then the surrounding soil caved in. All the potential forces of misfortune converged along innumerable slopes toward the same abyss.

Clearly it is too soon to attempt a thorough analysis of the different factors of which I have just spoken. We lack essential documents. The diplomatic and military history of the war will be written later and will lead undoubtedly to protracted controversy. I should like only to stress the extreme diversity of the lines of explanation to be considered. The impression that we all had here, that France had

been betrayed on all sides, squares doubtless with reality, provided only that in the word 'betrayal' we see something much broader, complex, something at once more tragic and less suggestive of criminal intent than is usually meant by the word.

II

POLITICS

The first causes to be looked into are of a politico-social nature. Those leaders of the bourgeoisie and of high capitalist circles who were dominated by a spirit of class now have their revenge for the days of February 1934 and for the great scare of the sit-down strikes. We see now what had become of the country under the aegis of bourgeois leaders who, whether radical or reactionary, profoundly feared and despised the people, while, on the other hand, a socialism and a trade-unionism which, thanks to their class demagoguery, their selfishness and their false philosophy of life, were condemned to impotence and sterility, showed themselves adept only at frittering away the vitality of the nation and aggravating its divisions, and at the same time ruined from within the hopes and energies of the labour movement.¹

¹ I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am speaking here of the spirit of the labour leaders and their bureaucracy, not of the reforms and readjustments necessary to circumvent capitalism. The social reforms of 1936 in themselves were just; they repaired

Each class, each party, fearing the others, sought only to keep its gains; everywhere in the social and political field creative forces were paralyzed.

Politically the working class had been demoralized by Communism and emptied of its reserves of strength and heroism by the hopeless conflicts, the mental confusion, the atmosphere of deceit that Communism had spread in the camp of labour. When the war broke out, the Soviet-German pact and the Moscow-dictated instructions in favour of pro-German pacifism, coming hard upon a still warm chauvinistic "anti-Munich" agitation, put the finishing touch to the bewilderment of the workers.

On the other hand, the bourgeoisie, which remained the governing (and therefore the most responsible) class, had been politically demoralized by the wealth-possessing elements in its midst, who, dreading Communism — justifiably enough though moved purely by blind fear — were ready for any folly, obsessed by the *idée fixe* of grasping at

the gaps in a backward legislation. In one sense they were even too timid, because to be effective they should have been accompanied by structural reforms. But the spirit of which I speak is revealed by the fashion in which the forty-hour law was applied and in which labour disputes were embittered at a time when the danger from without was becoming more and more threatening.

anything whatsoever that might be strong enough to clamp down on the disorder of the masses and to keep business going. During the eight inactive months of the war, officers had as food for their thoughts those weeklies of the extreme right whose share in the intellectual and moral disintegration of the country should not be underestimated and in which hatred of England (especially since the Ethiopian affair), hatred of democracy, hatred of the 'plebs,' hatred of the 'leftists,' and hatred of the Jews went hand in hand with an unquestioning faith in the friendship of the dictators. The promptings of Rome and even, at certain points, of Berlin played as strong a rôle in the extreme right as did those of Moscow in the extreme left; the solidarity of 'order' and the solidarity of the 'revolution' dominated every other sentiment in the one camp as in the other.

Nor must we overlook the preposterous financial policy practised for years by all the parties, and the defeatist policy assiduously pursued in the midst of war by the Communists on the one hand and on the other by a certain number of politicians, financiers, and socialites, whose names the American papers are beginning to mention.

Finally, there are two things we should not forget. There was the creation of the Popular Front — product of Russian machiavellianism and built upon a lie (a coalition with no possibility of a positive common outlook claiming to construct and govern) — which disorganized and paralyzed French political life. There was also the fact that the European war in reality had its prelude in the Spanish civil war — a period during which the policy of the Chamberlain government assumed heavy responsibilities. The inextricable confusion of ideas which grew up around this war began thenceforth to obscure among us the sense of the most obvious national interests.

The result of all this was that the basic force of a country at war, its inborn national instinct, which for France is the instinct for liberty combined with confidence in the strength and vocation of her people, had been profoundly undermined before the war started. When the conflict broke out, we thought that in the face of that tremendous event — which filled us all with horror, into which, though none of us had any enthusiasm for it, the people of France entered with grim courage, and for which, since our leaders had declared war, we fancied our-

selves ready — this basic national force would surge up spontaneously out of that patriotic devotion which is indeed ever alive in the mass of the nation. We did not stop to think enough that, since this war was in reality an international civil war, several months of military inactivity would, among many people, enable the forces of internal moral disintegration to overcome the national instinct. We did not think that the wretched little meannesses and rivalries of blind politics, continuing more busily than ever under the cloak of censorship, would only aggravate and hasten the breakdown of the state and nullify the self-sacrifice of the fighting men. In the narrow little world of those who held the destinies of the fairest land under the sun in their keeping, almost no one of them had confidence in France. Some of them even counted on her defeat to teach her a lesson and bring her to repentance.

In short, it appears that the parties which claimed to represent liberty and the people were utterly bankrupt. They had truly lost all faith in their own principles. For a long time they felt when facing the 'rightists' a strange inferiority complex, a vague feeling that the latter at least could lay claim to a

philosophy, however rudimentary it might be, to a tradition, and to that thing called authority which each day slipped irretrievably from their weak hands. Although fearing and abhorring the right, the leaders of the leftist parties, once in power, had but one idea in their heads — to merit the esteem and regard of the social strata represented by the right. Their foreign policy, moreover, lacked both plan and energy; it vacillated deplorably and was paralyzed by electioneering considerations and the catch-phrases of internal politics. They stressed with reason — and in this they were truly within the French tradition — the national sentiment for liberty and the nation's generosity, and they stressed too the saving instinct which saw in the totalitarian dictatorships a mortal peril for the nation, for the peace of the world and for civilization. Yet they knew neither how to elicit, by dint of will-power, the hard effort and sacrifices which might have exorcized this peril, nor how to arouse a great sweep of national enthusiasm, were it only in the name of the old Jacobin tradition, by now stone dead. Many of them had fallen victims to a pacifist ideology which subjected them to a morbid fear of any resort to

force, even when that had become the last remaining way of avoiding war and disaster. And — apart from a few individuals and some groups which had the necessary intelligence but lacked any effective influence — they kept gnawing away as long as they could at the military credits and the rearmament appropriations.

The bankruptcy of the parties which claimed to stand for authority was no less complete. Withdrawn into their resentments and self-conceit, worshipping force, and believing only in the pseudo-realism of a petty, impotent machiavellianism, hating and sabotaging everything which addressed itself to generosity and greatness as tainted with sentimentalism and 'ideology,' looking upon France as a half-decadent country which must abandon all claim to a major rôle in world affairs and fall back upon a policy of national selfishness and abdication, their leaders had energy only to ruin every attempt at governing made by their weak political opponents, demonstrating thereby an incredible indifference to the common good and the good name of their country. In truth, the France they loved and wanted to serve was not France but

merely 'their' France. With no more wit than a gardener who would split a tree from top to bottom and destroy half its roots, they excluded from their hearts and cut off from the national community half (and undoubtedly more than half) of the French people, of French history and traditions, everything that did not belong to the 'good' France, 'their' France. In a word, they relied upon the totalitarian dictatorships and put their trust in them. By a self-contradiction, the reverse of that in which the leftists had imprisoned themselves, they rightly denounced the danger run by the country and rightly demanded the armaments it needed; but at the same time they disarmed the country morally, bewildered and broke down its instinct for safety by delivering it over to the machinations and the propaganda of the dictatorships which hated France, and by blocking everything which France was trying to do to halt the dictators' advance. Ready for anybody's war against Communism, they would not hear of risking war with Hitler and Mussolini, in whom they insanely saw the defenders of order and property; and the idea of a victory of democratic France over the dictators frightened them as a disaster for what they

considered the interests of civilization. In this respect much of the drawing-room talk bandied about before the war sounded like treason. When the war broke out, the partisans of the right did their duty in the same way as the rest of the nation, and many of them heroically gave their blood for their country. But many of the political leaders, even among those who entertained no defeatist sentiments, were in such a state of mind as to make them incapable of withstanding a set-back. If a military set-back should occur — then make peace at once! As it happened, it was not a military set-back, but a military catastrophe that occurred.

Thus the leftists failed democracy, the rightists failed France. Among public men, the only great figure was that of Cardinal Verdier. He died in time, lest he die of grief.

III

THE PEOPLE

I have viewed the political scene. Let me now look at the people. It is not true that the crushing of France is, as the totalitarian propagandists would have it, a symptom of the inherent impotence, of a radical disease in the body of democracy as such. Neither is it true that it is a proof of the decadence and corruption peculiar to the French people and French democracy. (The breakdown of France points to a source of ill-health and a source of error which, though not inherent in democracy, threaten all modern democracies, because this malady and this error stem from a false philosophy of life that has been fattening parasitically upon the democracies for a long time.

Faith in the dignity of the human personality, in brotherly love, in justice, and in the over-worldly worth of the human soul as outweighing the whole material universe — faith, in a word, in the conception of Man and his Destiny which the Gospel has

deposited at the very centre of human history — this faith is the only genuine principle by which the democratic ideal may truly live. (Any democracy which, by its very nature as a political entity, lets this faith be corrupted, lays itself open to that extent to disruption.) May I be permitted to quote in this connection what I was saying in France six months before war started: “Let there be no misunderstanding. It is not a matter of sewing new patches on to old garments. What is needed is a thorough-going spiritual overhauling. And this purification is taking place before our eyes in the cruelest form, both in the domain of temporal events and in the verdict of history. If on the political plane we have seen the democracies lose, these past few years, at every throw, the reason lies not merely in the mistakes which they keep on making; these very mistakes, these very weaknesses, seem themselves to be predestined each time. This fatality, which works against the democracies, comes from the false philosophy of life which for a century has been perverting their true vital principle, paralyzing it from within, and thereby causing them to lose faith in themselves. (The totalitarian dictatorships,

meanwhile, thumbing Machiavelli to a much better purpose than the democracies, have the fullest faith in *their* principle — force and cunning — and gamble their all upon it.) The historical trial will go on until the root of the trouble is exposed and, by the same token, the guiding principle of democracy — its true nature at last revealed — lights the way to hope renewed and faith invincible.” Viewed from this angle, it becomes clear that the French disaster is but a specific instance — a peculiarly tragic one — of a tragedy that is world wide.¹ There is not a single nation today but is involved in this tragedy, none that may say: The misfortune of France is not in the least my misfortune, and of this misfortune I am quite innocent.

* * *

Could the democracies have avoided the war? They unquestionably could have avoided this war if they had had the wit and the moral courage either to forestall Hitler's taking power by adopting at once a generous and firm policy toward Germany while

¹ Cf. Yves Simon, “The European Crisis and the Downfall of the French Republic,” *Review of Politics*, January, 1941.

she was still disarmed, or by overthrowing Hitler before he got too strong. \ (Instead of that,) both in England and in France,) the democracies wretchedly deserted their own cause and their own ideals everywhere in the world and allowed themselves to be led to the slaughter by an incompetent and not altogether honest leadership. (Added to that, the everlasting discrepancies in rhythm and tempo between the psychological reactions of the two countries have played a continually pernicious part, /

Nations that want to survive and live in peace have to understand that neither of these two goals is to be attained without clearly facing the risk of war; it is only when the existence of this risk has been taken cognizance of and accepted that it is possible to adopt an intelligent enough policy to obviate it. The European democracies understood this too late. Every democracy whose rule of life is not heroic but hedonistic will grasp such things too late.

After the occupation of the Rhineland and the heavy rearmament of Germany, and particularly after Munich, all the best observers of the European situation regarded war as inevitable. The only policy, in my opinion, which might still have had

some chance of avoiding it, would have been a policy of intensive rearmament and effective alliances coupled with an adequately resilient and conciliatory diplomacy, a diplomacy just conciliatory enough to gain time, until an internal economic or moral crisis should render the dictatorships powerless to bring on war.) Such a policy could succeed only on condition — we were a long way from it, alas! — that the democracies be adamant in their moral stand, and sufficiently unanimous spiritually to resist the psychological assault of the totalitarian régimes' variegated propaganda.

Whatever the details of an as yet but incompletely known diplomatic history of this war may reveal later on, the events themselves are sufficient evidence that, on the contrary, the hand-to-mouth policy followed was as reckless as it was faint-hearted, a tissue of deception and make-believe. Hitler might still have been easily stopped and overthrown at the time of the German army's occupation of the Rhineland; he was not interfered with. (The British ministers were enjoying their week-end the day he annexed Austria.) .

At the time of the Munich agreements it might

have been supposed that the democratic leaders had an idea in their heads, that they thought it might perhaps be best to turn the German frontier into a sort of *Limes* of the civilized world, abandoning to the Nazi empire all of Europe lying beyond that barrier, leaving it to time and the forces of dissolution inherent in such an empire to do their work, and uniting the democracies on the hither side of the *Limes* to preserve in the world a civilization based on liberty. Such an idea would, in my opinion, have been a chimera, which Nazi dynamism would have swiftly bored through and got the better of; but at least it would have been an idea; it would have come pretty close to looking like a coordinated and foresighted plan. As a matter of fact, there was nothing of the kind. (The democratic statesmen had merely thought, in their inexcusable innocence, that Hitler would live up to his word and that the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia would be the beginning of a sincere understanding between Nazism and the democracies which would bring prosperity and benefit business.) This dream having blown away swiftly and unexpectedly, there was nothing for it but to come back, willy-nilly, to the alternative of resist-

ance. Only it was a resistance without vision, tempered by the blind hope of tying Hitler down and keeping the peace by now affecting a stern attitude, now making brave gestures to impress the people at home, whilst in the background doors were left ajar through which negotiations for a compromise with the Nazis might at need be resumed. (At no time did anyone try to understand and size up the character of the Führer and the capacity of the Nazi revolution for violence and destructiveness. No one had taken the trouble to read *Mein Kampf*. The democratic politicians were so much in the habit of never doing what they said, it did not occur to them that Hitler was saying what he meant to do. At the very time that Germany was being led to believe that the democracies were working for her "encirclement" — a belief calculated, of course, to drive her to extremities — the iron ring that was supposedly being erected round her was in reality a paper wall. The "guarantees" given to Poland and other European States were waved as horrendous menaces which Germany "would not dare" challenge, as if political shadows could ever stop a Hitler. The one thing that might have stopped him

— a combination of genuine force capable of exacting a genuine decision — the chance for that was thrown away when the strategic bastions upon which it might have been erected were one after another frittered away, and the democracies had at their disposal no plan of action with which to exert effective military pressure. When the negotiations with Soviet Russia, herself fear-ridden and haunted by the dread that England might throw upon her the brunt of the fighting in an armed struggle with Germany, had come to nothing as a result of mutual mistrust and made room for the Berlin-Moscow pact, Hitler could, whenever it suited him, confront the democracies with the grim choice of either ruining and dishonouring themselves beyond redemption by handing over to him the domination of the world, or getting into a war which he for his part believed them to be too cowardly to accept. The outcome was inevitable, as in the darkest of the tragedies of Aeschylus. Or, rather, it was pregnant with the dark burden of the scourges in the Apocalypse. To have stood up to the calamity, to have accepted war with all its hazards in order to defend the world against the new barbarism, was for

the free nations — I mean the peoples, the inclinations of their governments be they what they might — evidence of a fortitude of soul so great that no subsequent breakdown or catastrophe can erase it.

* * *

A people may live under a democracy that is breaking up without itself disintegrating in its inner personal life. The French people was vanquished; it was not decadent. It was not its taste for pleasure and a life of ease that led to the catastrophe, as certain official statements, broadcast at the very moment when an armistice was being solicited, cruelly insinuated. The failures for which the leaders are answerable — the leaders of all degrees and all the parties — the failures due to the bungling of the General Staff as well as of the statesmen, must not be laid at the door of those who when mobilization was decreed set forth with such admirable dignity, with such quiet, noble determination, who laid down their lives by the thousand.

I do not mean to say that in the deeper causes of the defeat the people did not have its share of re-

sponsibility. First and foremost of its faults is in having given itself such leaders. I am well aware that no nation can be entirely absolved of the leadership in which it has more or less acquiesced. I said further back that even before war started, our people was politically demoralized. Its relation to its politicians was a highly peculiar one, though similar examples may be found elsewhere. It was what might be called in biological parlance a relationship of parasitical symbiosis. They put up with their parasites because they found certain specific advantages in playing host to them. They unloaded upon them their heavier responsibilities, they drew from them countless little private benefits, they used them as scapegoats to curse at when things went too badly; they took an interest and a vicarious part in their game after the fashion of amateur experts, ironically conniving with them, as it were, in their performances. For a long time they liked and mistrusted and endured them as they were, until the moment arrived — quite a few years back now — when they had just about enough of them.

It is well to point out, too, the sociological rôle played, in France as everywhere else, by the prole-

tarization of the middle classes, the confusion and political instability to which it led and the chance it afforded to irresponsible mob leadership. And I might add another thing which seems to me extremely relevant. The French people, precisely, I daresay, because of its longer experience with political life and self-government, was in the thick of a wave of self-criticism at the very moment when, on the other side of the frontier, the totalitarian chieftains were labouring with all their might and means to rouse the masses to the highest pitch of unquestioning fanaticism. I recall an article I read early in the war by a young French university man — one of the finest representatives of the younger generation and a most ardent defender of liberty — which he had written to uphold the Allied cause in the foreign press. His paper was from beginning to end nothing but a soul-searching study in which all our shortcomings were subjected to merciless criticism. The gist of it all, I daresay, was: We are resolved to have done with all our mistakes. And I do think really that had the fates given French youth ten years' leeway, it would have succeeded in bringing about an upswing in the country, spiritual

as well as social and political, that would have astonished the world. However that may be, the fact remains that soul-searchings and self-depreciation are not the most favourable state of mind for making war.

But what I should like before all else to call attention to here is that the disaster-breeding weaknesses which characterized French political life and the causes of which I tried to point out further back — weaknesses, indeed, which might have been overcome by a great man, had God raised one up — were, like the political system of which they were an integral part, excrescences upon the surface of French public life, without root in the depths and realities of the national character. So long as a democracy is sound, its political life flows out of the rank and file of the mass of the people. When it begins to break up, politics becomes the trade of a clique of specialists and drifts ever farther away from the bedstream of the national life. Indeed our people continued to keep intact its qualities of civilized climate — of humane kindness, of patient and diligent toil, of inborn mutual helpfulness. These virtues may lie unused, as happened in France

for many years, through no fault but that of the politicians and their party oligarchies. They may for a time seem befuddled; they persist just the same.

After every catastrophe in history the minds of men are exposed to the temptation of taking refuge in a wholesale indictment of each and everyone's omissions and commissions, thus escaping the more difficult job of hunting down the real causes of misfortune. Laudable and stirring as it may be, this 'escape into Ethics' contains also much self-delusion and weak-mindedness. In every human community, patently, evil plays a large part; it will always be easy, therefore, to find enough shortcomings in a beaten nation to indict it. It is ever easy, if not magnanimous, to pass harsh judgment upon the unfortunate.

There was much indecisiveness in France, much loose organization, negligence, slovenliness. Individualism run amuck. The standard of sexual morality, of civic and business ethics, was at a pretty low ebb, though it was unquestionably much higher than in the totalitarian states. In France at least people were still free to take stock of themselves,

and the sense of individual responsibility was in private life more highly developed. The worst of it was the official treadmill, the bureaucratic machine which seemed purposely contrived to bar the way to posts of public authority for those who by their abilities were best fitted to fill them. All these blemishes doubtless contributed to the present catastrophe, but rather as remote factors than as basic and determining causes. That the defeat of France, like all great calamities, should bring with it an insistent demand from each and all for moral and spiritual regeneration is obvious. But it is utterly irrational to see in the sins of the French the direct and decisive reason for that defeat when the sins of their conquerors cry to heaven.²

² It is particularly irrational to see in the French defeat the wages of France's sin against the fruitfulness of marriage. As if this sin were peculiar to France alone! As if the morality of the stud farm practised in Germany did not involve other wrongs and profanations quite as degrading! And as if military man-power superiority (possibly, also, the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, so profitable in this connection) were the mark and acme of moral superiority! The mere fluctuations of the birthrate are all the less relevant as a moral yardstick in that a drop in the birthrate may be due to many general factors other than birth control, and in view of the fact that a country like Japan, where birth restriction on a vast scale has been practised for a long time, enjoys a very high birthrate. A nation that does not want to fall into decay is in duty bound to be prolific, not by way of conforming to the requirements of totalitarian man-husbandry, nor even for reasons of mere demo-

Whatever be the shortcomings that France may have to blame herself for, she has remained faithful to the values of the spirit, to the sense of what is human, true and free, to the quality of generous humility in every-day life. She knew how to accomplish much with little,³ she respected the dignity of those who chose to be poor so they might live by the dream within them, she was the sanctuary of art and poetry to the whole world. Her civilization, her wisdom, resided not in any thin top layer of aristocrats of the mind, but reached down to the very depths of the people. She was the spiritual home of the nations of the earth, the preëminently Christian land. Before this war French intellectual

graphic utility, but on grounds of human worth — out of respect for human nature and the sanctity of marriage, and in virtue of that profound trust in the Principle of Being which is the natural and original form of the love of God. Such a nation has a duty to replenish the sources of its vitality, its health, the purity of its body. France has in this respect a tremendous task before it. But people who, be their background scientific or religious, are not content to lay stress upon the basic importance of these elementary biological values (a quite proper emphasis) but regard them as the final standards of morality, are false to the idea of relative rank of principle in both natural and religious ethics, and go over without realizing it to a virtually fascist or racialist morality, since the distinctive characteristic of the fascist and racialist ethic is that it makes biology the highest principle of morality.

³ On the *moyens pauvres*, see "Religion and Culture," in *Essays in Order*, pp. 45-48.

life was undergoing a brilliant revival. The boldest undertakings, the most noteworthy achievements were occurring in science, in industry, in the great technological plants. In the past twenty years or so a religious renaissance of the most genuine and fruitful kind was occurring in France, both in the spiritual field and in that of social service, and its harvest was now being brought in among the young intellectuals and among the working-class youth. The French Catholics had assimilated religious persecution, profiting by it to achieve their independence of the state, to revive in themselves the sense of the Gospel, to live and feel with the people, to kindle, with a spirit and dash meet for any conquest, a most active apostolic flame. The French people was *politically* demoralized; it was not *morally* demoralized.

* * *

I remember the months of August and September, 1939. Faced with events dreadful beyond all bounds, the French people maintained — to its honour, be it said, as well as in explanation of its weakness — a sense of balance, of human truthfulness,

of plain duty freely submitted to; and its manner of expressing this, without ringing phrases, without flag-waving, was one of the most beautiful and heart-rending things to be seen on this earth. "Mr. Hitler is not a gentleman," was how the barber put it in the little town where I happened to be a few days before mobilization. This under-statement meant that if Mr. Hitler did not stop, the barber and his friends were, for their part, inclined to do what was needful to render the relations between nations "more gentlemanly." The French people had no hatred for the Germans; Nazism seemed to them a disgraceful lot of foolishness, the war a stupid business. But their political instinct was keener than that of their leaders, and this instinct had made them sense for some time past that what was happening on the other side of the Rhine, combined with the backbonelessness of those who for the moment held the reins at home, would some day make that stupid calamity inevitable. That day having arrived, they had not a moment's hesitation as to what they must do. Except for the Communists, the people with one accord accepted the war as a nasty chore which there was no shirking. They went into it with grave faces and a

heavy heart, hoping that it would not turn them aside from their real work too long, their minds made up that when it was over everything would have to be overhauled, and in the meantime determined to wage a genuine war. They could not understand why the Germans were not attacked right off, while they were busy in Poland, still less why the Allies did not push Italy to the wall; ⁴ it was all the more incomprehensible as at that time everyone believed that, aviation apart, the arsenals of France were short of nothing. A war that was not a war looked suspicious to them; and General Gamelin's system came to them as the first disillusionment, the first premonitory heartache, to which, however, they resigned themselves hopefully. (Later on they were to fall into step only too blithely with the psychology of that system.) They submitted with infinite patience — though beneath that patience much disgust was gradually going to collect — to the way the

⁴ The Italian people did not want war; everybody knew that from the outset. Instead of making poor jokes on the subject, something that might better have been left to the Nazis, the democratic press should have respected the Italian people for not sharing Mussolini's illusions and for gagging at his nazified fascism. If the Duce, squarely faced with an allied ultimatum, had gone to war in September, he would most likely have been defeated, which would have meant the liberation of Italy.

censored press and the radio treated them like infants and kept on ladling out drivel.

There was precious little ideology in their make-up. For them the things at issue were quite simple, quite concrete, quite elementary things, and they did not see how there could be any compromise upon them. It was a question of the right to breathe freely, of getting up of a morning without being eyed by a police officer, of going ungovernessed to a freely chosen job, instead of being forcibly corralled into a labour camp, of the right to criticize the government and to read the papers which, while little stock could be taken in them, at least did not lie in chorus at the behest of the state. It was a question of the right to get married without having first to stop at the veterinary's, or to wonder whether one had not a grandmother somewhere with a would-be taint in her blood; of being free to bring up children according to one's own ideas and to say before them all that one thought, and even a bit more, without having to fear their turning informer to the police against their parents. It had to do with planning one's life unhampered, which, though it had indeed become bitter and care-ridden these last six or seven

years, was still a life of men, not of cattle; and with preserving untarnished the heritage of patience, intelligence and freedom handed down by fathers and grandfathers, and preparing all the while for the day when mankind should live a life more just and humane.

This is why the average Frenchman understood that the time had come to say "No" once and for all to the Nazi will to aggression. . . It meant that the war which he went into was a war for civilization — that it was no mere national quarrel, no mere gang-busting expedition, that it was neither a holy war nor a struggle over ideologies, but a battle for civilization.

What a pity that this straight thinking and sound instinctive feeling could not be crystallized into a clear and solid political consciousness!

If the world could have seen how such men set forth, and then what was done to them by incompetents, pessimistic patriots and receivers in bankruptcy, it would have cause to remember what Charles Péguy said concerning "*la politique*" befouling "*la mystique*." But it is not of "*la mystique*" that we are speaking here; it is only of sheer

healthy instinct. If the French rulers of our day remind us of the advisers of Charles VII, the people they governed did not have the conquering faith of Jeanne d'Arc; they were just good, brave and sensible Frenchmen.

IV

THE MILITARY KNOCKOUT

Rarely had a nation embarked upon a war with such high hopes as to its ultimate outcome. The French people expected frightful sufferings, but the idea of defeat seemed unthinkable; they were certain of victory. Theirs was a cause patently just, preparedness was deemed perfect, the army was in control; and as the people grew weary of politicians, their trust in the military chiefs increased. The general staff plans had overlooked nothing; the technique of war was nothing if not rationalized: the Maginot Line, science and technology, all concurred to set minds at rest. This early confidence, seemingly justified by the apparent stalemate of the first months, became a routine so firmly rooted that the great majority of the people could not shake it off until the very end. Letters written three days before the German march into Paris and received here after the disaster were still full of optimism.

As a matter of fact, this over confidence was of a

nature to provoke anxiety; it showed too great a reliance on clear ideas, a faith in rationalistic formulas, and rationalism breeds dreams — like opium. One of our ministers was wont to say, “We are waging a Cartesian war,” though this man unfortunately lacked Descartes’ own decision in practical matters. Indeed the “Descartes Line” proved even easier to circumvent than the Maginot Line. People had settled in the fool-proof contrivances devised for war as if they were an achievement of pure reason, that is of Peace. This instrument of high precision, the fruit of much intelligence, of much technical knowledge, and of much official inertia, was all in all a valuable asset. Its drawback was that, as American experts pointed out, it was a perfect solution to the problems of the first world war. General Gamelin’s lack of boldness, his policy of playing safe, his hatred of taking risks (which resulted in the maximum risk when the crucial moment was come), probably derived all from the love that this too intelligent man came to feel for the precious war machine he had devised, this masterpiece of art he hesitated to risk in the hazards of actual warfare.

A bare month was needed to demolish it com-

pletely. Before such a gigantic collapse, we must understand that in mechanized mass warfare as it is waged nowadays, the decision must need come with overwhelming swiftness. It is nonsense to claim that the French became panic stricken and that their native mettle was lost at a blow.

The nine months of waiting and inaction may have corroded their morale, but it had not ruined it. However grievous this long period of inaction may have been for an immense army, however depressing the kind of doleful idleness for the great bulk of men condemned to be spared the hardships of the front lines, it is a fact attested by common knowledge, that the endurance and courage of the rank and file remained admirable to the end, save in some sectors (this was the case, it seems, for the army of Sedan) undermined by a propaganda of revolutionary defeatism. Not to mention Flanders and Dunkerque, nor the heroic feats of individual units, it is obvious that troops that re-formed their lines in the thick of a German hell let loose, who stood up to this massive tidal wave, deprived of sleep for days, and of weapons that could score against planes and tanks, undernourished, cut off from help, that these

gallant fellows who fought until they collapsed from sheer exhaustion, deserve better than the scorn of parlor strategists.

But no trooper, be he ever so gallant, will jeopardize his life for nothing; when he perceives that his superiors are giving up the battle as lost, when he is ordered to retreat — not to fall back gradually but to take to his heels — when he sees that, about him, both civil and military set-ups are crumbling, when rumors of treason fly thick, a man's only thought is to shift for himself as best he can. The dispersion never became a general panic; it was not the cause of the defeat, but its sequel.

After Sedan, the high command had realized that the game was up. If any heroic measures could still be considered, they were outside the scope of the military arts. Exceeding all calculations in sheer numbers, the German advance crushed our attempted stand on the Somme and the defeat could not be righted. The motorized offensive, rushing ahead faster than the retreat, cut it off. Struck at a single vital point, the delicate precision cogs of the vast modern war machine jammed.

A handful of traitors stationed at crucial points

can cause a harm disproportionate to their number, if only by preventing the blowing-up of bridges. Traitors there were, though probably fewer than rumoured. But the misfortune of war cannot explain away everything. Such tragedy on so vast a scale could not happen unless the general staff had gravely miscalculated. It is public knowledge that some fifteen generals were ousted, that Premier Reynaud frankly admitted that the blunders of certain army chiefs passed understanding, and that the commander-in-chief is to face military trial. The fighting men were taken unawares by steel monsters to which they could only oppose their bodies. A plan of campaign conceived and elaborated along defensive lines had to be suddenly turned into an offensive. The whole strength of the army, ammunition and mechanized divisions included, was tossed into the maelstrom of the Belgium battlefield, leaving the "little Maginot Line" utterly stripped. Our leaders had reckoned on a long war and the preparation was proceeding apace, notwithstanding martinets and red-tape; another year and the production of arms and ammunition would have been in full swing. . .

By the time General Weygand assumed command, these blunders were past mending. General Gamelin had, and doubtless deserved, the reputation of being a very good general, and it is probable that his plans looked as good as others on paper: he was not a man of action. But the crucial mistake was not his alone; it was, here also, a mistake of rationalists, the result of school-tie solidarity. The crucial mistake was, at the very beginning, to have believed and to have led the country to believe that military preparations were adequate, that the conflict would find us technically ready for victory. The mistake was to bank all on safety, to gamble on a thoroughly well equipped frontier when in point of fact the frontier was only partially protected (as if Belgian neutrality sufficed and made unnecessary the extension of the Maginot Line). It was as if a man barricading his house against bandits, had closed all doors and left the windows open. The mistake too, was to have ignored the lessons of the Polish war and, before that, to have closed their bookish minds to the startling import of those new weapons of which Germany was making no secret, and which all the technical journals had discussed.

It consisted also in having scorned and sidetracked the warnings and new concepts of warfare (so sound that Germany conquered France by applying them) of the only specialist who had clearly perceived under what conditions and with what new weapons victory could be won.

Finally a total war such as we see today, involves the civic leaders as well as the general staff. In this connection it is enough to state that this war was carried out by the same men who had proved themselves incapable of preventing it.

* * *

In my opinion the democracies are not to be condemned for not having prepared war as efficiently as Hitler's Germany. Freedom can only thrive in a peaceful world; the concomitant drawbacks are the price we pay for a more civilized way of life. The Nazi chieftains thought exclusively of war, they cherished it, they threw their heart and soul into it, they sacrificed all things, including their people, to the loving task of perfecting the slaughter. Peace-loving and freedom-loving people cannot prepare for war with any such efficiency, unless they feel

themselves directly threatened.) As a matter of fact, Fascist Italy, for all its bluff and bluster, managed its military preparedness even worse than the democracies. On the other side of the ledger, one factor in the superior strength of German armament came from tanks and airplanes constructed by Czechoslovakia according to French specifications, weapons on which the French army counted in fact before Munich. What may be justly expected of a democracy is that it be not *too badly* prepared, and that, the moment war threatens, it does all in its power to bring its strength up-to-date. The great sin of the democracies was not to have seen war when it came, to have supposed that a war might be won without being waged, to have relied on the blockade and the passing of time to wear down savages armed to the teeth, to have adopted the notion of a "war of limited liability," "cheap in blood as well as in money," on the pattern set by Liddell Hart. Such a psychology strangely corresponded with the lapses in the tactical plans of the military leaders and which then helped to spread this psychology throughout the nation. Our politicians, as did the English before the rise of Mr. Churchill, went to war ridden

with their peace-time fumbings, lack of initiative, lack of aggressiveness and of decision. We have yet to learn what part those civilians played in the high command of the military operations, and in committing certain strategic errors for which the general staff alone cannot shoulder the blame.

V

THE ARMISTICE

In attempting an evaluation of the psychological conditions that governed the supreme military heads of France as they decided to ask the invader for an armistice, after having engineered the downfall of the Reynaud cabinet, one must remember first of all these points:

1. The army was in full flight;
2. The country, stunned overnight by the crushing disaster, clogged by floods of refugees that German planes machine-gunned on the roads, thoroughly disorganized and without defensive means against the threatened destruction of cities and villages, was as a man black-jacked, with its psychological defenses gone;
3. The Reynaud government was, except for a minority, suffering from the general dismay. Discounting its own powers to impose on the country whatever decisions might be necessary, it had lost confidence in its own authority to the point where it

seemed prudent to ask an aged marshal (still haloed by the glory of Verdun) to shoulder the responsibility for these decisions. In calling upon Marshal Pétain, Premier Reynaud may, even then, have foreseen the necessity of having at his side a man capable of persuading the French to accept defeat, if the worst came to the worst.

As regards the military situation, it appears certain that Marshal Pétain and General Weygand assumed responsibilities with the firm conviction — reached, it seems, before the fall of Paris — that, the military defeat being irreparable, to prolong the struggle on French soil meant the butchering of their men without a chance of bettering the odds.

However grave, this was not the crux of the matter. Faced with the irremediable situation of the army, was it better to choose a total capitulation of French forces, or the local capitulation of the army of France proper, while the French government would be free to leave the country and to continue the struggle with the fleet and the remaining forces of the French Empire,¹ accepting for that purpose Mr.

¹ Such a plan was feasible; England had promised the full co-operation of her fleet and other resources, given such an eventuality.

Churchill's proposal of a merger of both Empires.

Either way, the choice implied for the country frightful eventualities. The problem was one of choosing the lesser evil, and that too was catastrophic. Not to mention those mysterious designs of Providence that man is not allowed to weigh, but using the light of reason as imposed on human judgment, it must be said that the alternative chosen was not the better one.

The military chiefs who pleaded for an armistice and urged the French capitulation were undoubtedly patriots ready to sacrifice the very marrow of their bones for the good of their country. But was their political judgment of as great a calibre as their devotion? I say political, for the decision to be attained was vastly more complex than is a strictly military decision. This is a distinction of crucial import.

To attempt an understanding of how such a decision was arrived at, one must keep in mind the following considerations:

1. Soldiers acting on political ground are naturally inclined to see the problem in the specialized light of their calling. From this point of view, a

war lost on national soil immediately seems a war totally lost. By definition, any general solution taken from a limited point of view courts failure. The political decision taken in this case solely from the military point of view had every chance of being a bad political solution.

(2. The men who took this decision suffered in their inner make-up from the "rightist" complex, with the prejudices, pessimism, vagaries and rancours I outlined above. In their opinion, their own country had long been corrupted by hateful ideas and institutions. At the moment when everything seems to collapse, the natural reflex of men of such ilk is to maintain order within, rather than call upon the supreme resources of the nation and struggle on with every means in their power. The newspapers have exposed in the Tours incident how paramount was this fear of disorder, General Weygand having then vouched that Paris was in the throes of a communistic outbreak, with the Elysée Palace already in the hands of the mob.

The rightist circles had, before the war, nurtured a weakness toward the dictators, not realizing that Fascism and Nazism, rooted as they are in the same

radical evil as Communism, exist only to supply this evil with more perfected means of destruction. These circles approved of the statesmanship of Mr. Hitler and of Mr. Mussolini: 'Why not trust their word as much or as little as that of any other statesman, for they lie neither more nor less than any other of their breed.' The deep-seated instinct, sprung from the very roots of our history, which had caused in September the French people to rise as one in defence of liberty, was to the Right only a hollow ideology. From what one knows of the political ideas and ties of Marshal Pétain and General Weygand, of the men they trusted even before the war, and of their guiding concepts, one is led to believe that, in this domain, they were bound to show a very definite partisan spirit. [Marshal Pétain was a friend of General Franco, an admirer of his brand of crusade; he came to think that the only way of saving France was through a Catholico-dictatorial régime on the Spanish line. Of the politicians and doctrinaires that surrounded him, several had been conspiring from the beginning of the war toward an early understanding with Hitler; in their desire to pit the 'good France' against the

'bad France,' they probably thought that the defeat of their country spared it — and them — the trouble of a civil war (whose potential results had been already brought about by the enemy). The defeat suffered became the opportunity to save France first of all from herself and from the democratic Republic — and even in the end from Germany, for by gaining the confidence of the totalitarian régimes, by setting up a government attuned to theirs, the foundations of a possible permanent agreement with the dictatorships could be laid, with Italy to act as go-between. In short, the previously thwarted attempts against the political liberties of French citizens and against the temporal vocation of France could now come to fruition, provided that defeat was accepted totally and its responsibility laid upon the 'bad' France that had aligned itself against Fascism.

(3. The authors of the armistice believed in the imminent defeat of England. Immediate appearances and the psychological shock resulting from the military disaster, lent colour to such belief. Had not the French army been the major military rampart, yet within one month its whole fighting power

had been crushed! How could England alone hold out when she had proved unable to help her ally? Having made the mistake of bungling French preparedness, they made the second mistake of considering technical preparation as paramount, of minimizing the dogged tenacity of British morale, the vital defensive reflex of the English at bay. England would be made to bend or break in a few weeks and Germany would win the war. Why shackle the country to a British Empire that was already sinking?

Such must have been the reaction of the French military chiefs when the proposal to unite the two Empires — British and French — was made by Mr. Churchill to Mr. Reynaud. This proposal, which contemplated a single government for the two combined Empires, presided over by a Frenchman, which offered each citizen of both countries double Franco-British nationality, incorporated a very great and sound idea. It would have required, besides a flair for greatness, much strength of spirit and decision to accept and apply it at a time when accumulated grievances against our ally were being aired by French public opinion. It was said that

petty politicians vetoed the measure as incompatible with the independence of France, which they refused to make subservient to the British Empire. They doubtless viewed Mr. Hitler's protection as safer for this independence than the federation of two free countries. Other politicians — among the most despised in our country, and the most spiteful — had, long before that, stacked their lot against England. It was also feared that Germany, profiting by the resentment the French people would have shown a government that left the invaded fatherland for Africa, might set up in France a puppet government eager to do its bidding. However well founded such fears (and yet French morale might have been less confused and the Germans more hindered by a puppet government openly under enemy control than by a "free" government with a noose around its neck), they were, in any case, fears out of all proportion to the magnitude of the stakes. Last but not least there was a fear of losing the favour of Fascist Italy, such a good neighbour, and one on which the great political scheme was to lean at the conclusion of peace; for Italy would have to be

fought eventually in the Mediterranean if the French Empire were to carry on the war side by side with the British Empire. /

Something else came into play, something which is not of the political order and may be sometimes coupled, as it was in the Munich period, with the worst political weakness, yet the human heart knows its worth: pity, pity for today, for a people suddenly sunk into a chasm, for the soldiers and prisoners who would have been entirely left at the doubtful mercy of the victor, if the struggle had continued. A more transcendent pity might have prevailed over this pity, and did not: a pity for tomorrow, for the very being of France threatened in its historic existence, and for the generations to come, that a permanent Nazi victory would maim.

* * *

Thus, we can understand how military leaders of staunch patriotism, surrounded by so-called realist politicians, came to impose the armistice on a country numbed by defeat, to withdraw France from combat in a war on whose outcome hung the fate of France herself and of civilized humanity. In truth,

they too were supremely *reasonable*. The tragedy is that all this would perhaps have been reasonable if the enemy we had dealings with were not Nazism, and if it were conceivable that a Frenchman could accept the subjection of France to a hellish rule, and if a nation could resign itself to a Hitler victory as to that of any other chief of state in the civilized Europe of old, and if, when face to face with Hitler, the only possible answer, the only one made possible and perfectly obvious by his own achievements, were not: 'anything else but him.' Just as military tactics had been planned in France for a war and an enemy obsolete by twenty years, the armistice was planned for an enemy and a peace of fifty years ago. Marshal Pétain typified this attitude by his readiness to speak to Hitler as *soldier to soldier*. At these words the Führer must have looked at his hands and felt over his conscience an unexpected breath of fresh air.

Once the armistice had been sought, it became almost impossible to refuse its terms; they probably were much more severe than those expected on the strength of the information given by the intermediaries entrusted with the opening negotiations.

According to reliable sources, the tentative terms offered by the Germans were much more lenient, but implied that the French fleet, air force, and other armaments should be delivered to Germany to be turned against Great Britain. These first proposals, favoured by one group in the Pétain-Laval government and rejected by another, were finally turned down as dishonourable. We know what the next proposals were, and that they were accepted. Two thirds of the country were to be occupied, the rest under the permanent threat of the conqueror. Germany agreed, however, to refrain from using our ships for its own ends; the fleet was to be interned in French ports. Thus the promise given Great Britain never to surrender the fleet was substantially kept, and this loyalty paid for dearly. But the terms of this agreement meant an implicit reliance on Germany's word. (In America everyone believed that the last act of the Reynaud government would be an order to the fleet to take refuge in British ports, or that it would be made party to a friendly kidnapping. But France, banking on the imminent collapse of England, reasoned that such a move meant the final loss of its ships.) Refugees who

had trusted the French hospitality were to be surrendered to the Gestapo; our army of the Near East was to lay down its arms; we had to withdraw from the contest the still immense reservoir of forces that constitutes the French Empire. We were to resign ourselves to the prospect of a peace that would inevitably mean the end of France as a major power and the hegemony of Hitlerian Germany — without having exhausted or even put into action the means of resistance that France still controlled outside her territorial limits. When all means of defence are exhausted and a superior foe forces unacceptable terms on the vanquished, there is no dishonour in yielding under protest and under compulsion. What staggers is that the Pétain government proclaimed that the terms of the armistice forced upon it were honourable, meaning that they were acceptable in themselves. It had no choice but to consider them honourable, since such terms had come to be accepted before all means of resistance had been physically exhausted. †

That the population as a whole acquiesced in the armistice is comprehensible. All its psychological springs were broken by an *instantaneous* and com-

plete disaster. The people had been kept in ignorance of the facts in a way unworthy of them, and their optimism lasted until the very fall of Paris, or even days later where news was slow to spread. Within a week, they felt thrust into the abyss. Their leaders told them that all was lost; they saw in the armistice only the end of the slaughter. Rather than a moral breakdown, it was a phenomenon of psycho-physical shattering that took place.

Events, at the moment of writing, have only begun to justify our hope, for which both heart and reason have good grounds, that English tenacity will at last change heroic resistance into victory. But already time has made this much clear: If English effort had been backed by the power of the French fleet, of the army mustered in the Near East from the start of the war, of French Africa and other parts of the French Empire, and if, shedding inane illusions about Italy, we had charged down upon her full force, this most vulnerable member of the Axis would have been incapacitated, and Germany put in a precarious position. It may be supposed that

Marshal Pétain and General Weygand bitterly regret today that they did not hope against hope.

* * *

What appears worse than the armistice, considered in itself as a purely military measure, is the mental attitude concerning the international situation with which it came to be signed. An armistice concluded under duress could have preserved dignity in misfortune, had it safeguarded an absolute loyalty of feeling to the values that had been deemed worthy of being fought over, had it preserved a sense of moral solidarity towards the allied people that we were forced to abandon. (In this regard, it seems that the military leaders made only the mistake of believing that England was shortly to be defeated. But we may still wonder whether a number of politicians, sheltering themselves behind the authority of Marshal Pétain, did not see in the military defeat the chance for a long hoped-for reversal of alliances, with the connivance of Fascist Italy and of her friends in France)

It seems that the "dagger thrust in the neighbour's back" aroused less indignation in the French

political circles of which I speak than among American statesmen, and that they saw in Italy's declaration of war a well-matured political plot which might benefit prostrate France, when Mussolini, in solemn fellowship with Hitler, would decide upon the conditions of peace. In fact, the moderation of the Italian armistice terms were of a nature to confirm them in this illusion. His deed done, Mr. Mussolini proceeded to open their eyes, if indeed one can talk of undeceiving people who think it clever to trust a liar, in the belief that his lies are for ever meant to deceive others than themselves. (As a matter of fact, it was not Mussolini that France was fated to face: it was Hitler, ready to apply to those unfortunate men who would thenceforth be her leaders, this infernal machine of threats and temptations meant to enslave her in the end. The armistice government had thrown itself, and France for good measure, into a tragic trap. The Führer and his henchmen had but to tighten those pitiless screws and to crush France at their pleasure if she ever attempted a move against their will\ However open one's eyes may be to the so-called political realism with all the follies it entails, it seems almost unbe-

lievable that responsible Frenchmen could not only choose the very moment when the fate of each separate nation is hanging on that of the entire world, to adopt a foreign policy based on national egoism, but also bank, against England, on a continental system dominated by the Nazi empire. How would they imagine even for a moment that a union of "Latin" countries of authoritarian pattern could balance such power, in which a France refurbished to the taste of the dictators could hope for a tiny "free" place in an enslaved Europe? Such a policy, however — since it meant turning against an allied nation to whom, in spite of grievances, France was honour bound, and which continued alone to struggle against the enemy — furnished a most demoralizing application of the political materialism much in favour nowadays.

The consequences came fast. Four months after the conclusion of the armistice the French generals in command of our African Empire swore to hold fast to every inch of it and Marshal Pétain, earning in this our gratitude, rejected the proposals of military cooperation with the Axis that still remains a goal of the Nazis. But he was coerced into agree-

ing, at least in principle, to a "collaboration" at what is called by German propaganda the reconstruction of peace in Europe, and at a "new order," which if truly and lastingly established, would mean the subjection of Europe to Nazi totalitarianism, with France gathered definitely into Germany's orbit.) We may well believe that the new interpretation thus given to the armistice terms brought strong indignation in French opinion; but opposition at this stage could only limit the evil and avoid the worst. A collaboration forced upon a people that loathes it is not only torture, but a permanent threat of catastrophe. The growing humiliations and more and more cruel difficulties that France has still to face are but the fatal result of the conditions under which the armistice was signed.

* * *

The political operations that accompanied the armistice at home were its expected corollary. The Republic was conjured away, a motto of which France was proud abolished, the motives of a just war repudiated; all that, along with a hastily manufactured façade of *ancien régime* and moral order,

was not a reconstruction after bankruptcy, but the very bankruptcy of the French political régime. What happened next, which had better be glossed over as best one can, was but the expected follow-up, imposed moreover by German pressure. All of this follow-up inevitably unrolled by degrees: without even awaiting the end of the war, an indiscriminate prosecution was launched, not only of incompetents who deserved punishment, but also of patriots who had opposed defeatism, and of political foes now the victims of reprisals — a hunting down of scapegoats. Anti-semitic slogans were given free rein, racist laws, which are a denial of the traditions and spirit of France, were adopted under German orders. Such shameful measures came to be introduced gradually, with a *moderation* of language that bears witness to an uneasy conscience — until the time would be ripe for the opening of concentration camps. Shams worn already threadbare by Nazi and Fascist abuse (corporative apparatus, state youth organizations, etc.) became false outlets for action. The traditions of French hospitality toward political refugees were betrayed. The wave of destructive illusions, which the spirit and propaganda

of the conqueror are trying to unleash throughout the world, spread over the country, with occasional attempts to pass them off as French. We know that to the most deplorable of these things the Vichy government lent itself only under duress. But it had to yield in order to remain "free," in order to thwart the always actual German threat of delivering France to a frankly pro-Nazi government.¹ Germany has in reserve still more implacable means of imposing her will. The hands of the French government are tied by the Wiesbaden commission.

All it can do is to try its best to save the shreds of independence left, and to fight day by day against the dreadful evils which are crushing the country. The Vichy government has been very zealous in such a kind of social service work. This work, which concerns the elementary conditions of physical existence and which must needs be undertaken under similar circumstances by any government whatever, cannot atone for the faults committed in the political domain, but it is pressingly urgent, and although not, speaking absolutely, the most important, remains at this moment the most needed. It would be naive to suppose that Governments

whose political inspiration is open to the gravest criticism, cannot, in the particular order of which we are now speaking, do useful and thorough work. It has been said, and I willingly believe it, that some people have devoted night and day to this work, that the result of such effort has been an unexpected resumption of communications and supplies over the unoccupied territory, and a certain amount of economic activity in the midst of unheard-of hardships. Let us add that even if the 'lesser evil' which the authors of the armistice had in view, had been actually purchased at a still dearer price, it remains no slight matter to the French that one third of France be spared German occupation. That everything was sacrificed to this advantage is no reason for underestimating its worth; France may find herself economically and psychologically cut in two, an unbearable situation rendered more so by the Germans; yet the fact that at least a part of our soil remains untrampled by the conqueror, that some of our property at least has not been sacked, a portion of our population not delivered, without recourse, to German police, German brutality, German requisitions, German sanctions and deceits — this check

to our misfortunes and subjection affects all of us. Even this, I know, can be brought suddenly to an end should the Germans decide to complete their occupation of France; which adds one more powerful instrument of blackmail to those already in their hands. Nevertheless, this being all that remains to the French, they treasure it the more. 1

In these matters there are details which foreign public opinion is too apt to neglect. Beaten under dreadful circumstances, the French have too many wounds to nurse, grudges to bear, and deadly perils to escape, to pay much attention for the present to anything but their woes; they instinctively overlook much for the sake of immediate survival.

A policy of complacency towards the totalitarian dictatorships can use as an alibi such a frame of mind born of misfortune. In the domain of home politics, the Vichy government sincerely endeavoured to improve by legislation those same public ethics which its own trend in matters of general policy tended to lower and ruin from within. That public ethics have not only held out, but improved, is due to the French people alone, and not to the loud vocal support and high esteem shown virtue by cer-

tain politicians and newspaper men whose work, for a number of years before this, has systematically tended to corrupt the morale of the nation.

The efforts now being made to maintain the family, restore the sense of the dignity of labour and of a devotion to the common good, answer a primary need and do coincide with the wishes of the people. Certain health measures (for instance, those concerning alcoholism) and certain reforms (for instance, those that concern peasant property) are of such a nature as to be the first steps towards a true reconstruction. But for this day to come, France would have to be freed from the German grasp, the moral and political truths now exploited along with a medley of propaganda slogans would have to acquire life and weight in some political climate divergent from the one prevailing today. The influence and spirit of the conqueror brand another propaganda now used in France, that paves the way for political adventures of a type all too well known, and upon which men more violent than the present executives are already eager to embark. The news received up to now leave the impression that a pre-fascist political stage is set; but in fact there

can be no fascist régime where there is no régime to speak of, and there cannot be any as long as Germany rules and France is a prisoner of war. The present set-up has the earmarks of a transitory moment in the midst of a colossal upheaval.

Judging from the documents at hand, the ideology being now fed to the French in the absence of a genuine reconstruction program, is a bizarre mixture of commonplaces, where theses borrowed from Catholic social teachings are imbedded in the teachings of the political school of total nationalism. Its feature is an active distaste for the principles of liberty and equality, an aversion for all generous "dreams," a mode it shares with the bulk of fascist ideology. It is the fate of every valuable formula to run the risk of counterfeit, but the spirit is plagued at the thought that great ideas and great words, such as 'hierarchy,' 'the right to work,' 'organized economy,' are in danger of being discredited and rendered odious by misuse. I will indulge here in a parenthetical remark: when you hear statesmen and journalists inveigh against the abuses of an outmoded liberalism, when they declaim that a sense of authority as well as one of liberty is

inherent in true democracy, ask yourself to what kind of terms the *but* of their remarks refers. If they say "liberty but authority, equality but hierarchy, justice but discipline, fraternity but order," you may infer as likely that in truth they detest democracy. The harsh term coming after the *but* annuls the softer term that precedes. If on the contrary the softer term happens after the *but*, it does not annul, but balances and humanizes the harsh term. That is why we should say "authority but liberty, hierarchy but equality, discipline but justice, order but fraternity. . ."

It is possible that the religious policy of the Vichy government has conciliated those same sections of international Catholic opinion which proved recently so soft a touch to a political exploitation of religious appearances. It would, however, be unfair not to acknowledge that those official measures which gave back to religious orders both their freedom and their capacity of teaching, did but sanction legally a state of things already in existence, and abolish legally injustices which had been practically eliminated from French life since the last war. The old anti-clericalism had vanished almost entirely, even from

political spheres. Was perhaps the Third Republic becoming reconciled to the Church, as do certain ageing unbelievers, because the strength of her passions was ebbing, and she felt that she was growing weak? Be that as it may, to assume that Vichy heralded in France the religious renaissance would be too blatant an imposture for any Frenchman to give it credence; it was under the Popular Front government that Cardinal Pacelli was received in triumph in Lisieux and Paris; it was from the French Republic that Pius XI had thought for a moment of asking asylum in case he should have to leave Rome. It is good that unjust laws be abolished; it is less fortunate for the Church of France that this justice be rendered by the armistice government. It may be of doubtful advantage for the Church to owe a debt of gratitude to a government towards which later on Frenchmen will probably feel little gratitude, and to seem the refuge as well as the compensation of temporal impotence. If our sources be true, the Church of France is not eager to chain herself to a state clericalism which would ruin in the long run the spiritual revival of which she is proud. She knows moreover that her freedom can be real only in a France

and a Europe set free. It is amongst Catholics that the resistance to German domination is most decided and most effective, as the Gestapo well knows. Several French bishops have already suffered because of their firmness; it is they who, on French soil, are saving French honour.

VI

THE FRENCH IN DEFEAT

France fell even before she felt herself really threatened. (Lulled into false security by a trickle of willfully censored news, she found herself blinded by the catastrophe, bound hand and foot and crushed to earth even before the organic reflex to defend her own national soil could awaken her deeper forces.) The psychological condition of England during the summer of 1940 was different. The collapse of French defenses had been a warning; there was very little time, but time nevertheless, to gauge the peril, to comprehend how, on their home Island, the English people were under threat of total extinction. In their case, the instinct of self-defense had time to come into play, to gather together their moral energies, to dig in with a single will for resisting to the end and to die, if need be, with their boots on; a will that forces admiration even from their foes.)

(Unbetrayed by their ruling classes, the English

people found a leader equal to the task.) That the United States put its shoulder to the wheel proved that moral convictions based on a deep-set love of freedom may become, when shared, an effective factor in human history. The check imposed so far upon German attempts at invasion, has shown that material and technical advantage in arms is not everything. It has proved also that moral force, when facing a superior war machine, can strengthen to advantage material means already powerful but outclassed. Without its R.A.F., Great Britain would have followed France. But the airpower and military machine of Germany were and will remain, for months to come, superior to the English.)

However deep may be the humiliation felt by a Frenchman at the thought of the events of these last months, he still has the right to ask that none should use the disaster brought to a great nation and the mistakes of its leaders to misjudge the people themselves, the unhappy people of France. I should like to show how their innate virtues were intermingled with their shortcomings in the very moment of their great trial, and how those virtues subsist in the present distress of the people—virtues numbed,

impotent, behind bars, cut off from the life of the world as if by a malefic bewitchment.

It is the privilege of the humble folk, alone, to be great in the midst of total disaster. We know that during the frightful days of June, 1940, both in town and country, the common people behaved admirably. When the flood tide of catastrophe swept everything before it, when the great exodus poured upon the highway hordes of men afflicted with acute anguish and misery, each one bore his own affliction with courage and helped his neighbour to bear his. Against the universal frenzy, the elemental energy, devotion and goodness of the people held fast. Foreign refugees arriving here have testified to the compassion and help tendered them. And now, in the darkness of defeat, in misfortune so total and crushing that each person and each family is tortured by an individual tragedy, the effort of the common people of the French *communes* to take up their work again and rebuild their homes in the sight and under the fist of the enemy, is in itself a proof of a vitality and an inborn courage that should demand respect.

Many here question this very effort. Surprised

to see this acceptance of defeat, this ready return to daily tasks as though the world war were at an end, this hope of reaching, beyond the disaster, for a new living space, they wonder if the French people have given up, have not lost faith in the vocation of France. But the reality, the tragic reality, is quite the contrary. This people has a privilege: it can digest misfortune; it is aware of enough substantial inner resources to accept defeat and to keep the will to live even after it has lost face. The ineradicable instinct of faith in France comes at such moments into play. The French are so organically sure that France has its vocation that they come to think of every defeat as transitory. It has happened before. Beaten, they must go back to work and, time aiding, they will get the upper hand, for the vocation of France must surely triumph over misfortune.

There is here at once a profound truth of the instinct as regards the continuity of life and the distant future, and a terrible deception of the mind as regards the present and the issues at stake. The French people has hardly begun to reckon the conditions of its recovery. Already it knows well the

crushing weight of German victory. Until the Hitlerian nightmare has been dispelled, the French people will have to learn further how stifling is the *collaboration* of the conquered with such a conqueror. By a sort of divine mercy, it has been half asleep up to now, stunned by the blow. As it awakens bit by bit, it is finding itself trapped, delivered over to the enemy. Frenchmen understand that if Germany beats the world they are not only defeated but conquered; they are perceiving that all this honest and dogged work in which they trust, work allotted by others, will be henceforth only a slave's task.

It is truly tragic that the natural virtues of the people and the perennial confidence just mentioned should have momentarily contributed to its very misfortune; and that, by a bizarre maladjustment, what is virtue on the plane of natural morality should have fostered, in the realm of politics, illusions which tend to pervert the destinies of the country.

The same kind of maladjustment is patent in many other points. We have seen it before—the need for restoring the primary conditions of physical existence, dwarfs at present all other considera-

tions in France. In certain cases, as Aristotle remarked, it is better to make money than to philosophize, although philosophy is better than money. Ridden with extreme misery, and with the enemy on their land, it is natural for the French to think of *not dying* before thinking of political problems. The policy of their rulers finds support in this normal reflex; they play on the deep love of the French for their soil, on this naturally sacred feeling which had much to do with their acquiescence in an armistice, by enlarging on the importance of preserving at least a part of this soil under a French rule supposedly free.

The policy of those who rule France at present took advantage not only of the apathy into which many had fallen under the weight of a superhuman tragedy and the excruciating anxieties that struck each in his personal life, but also of what may be described as the great French benevolence. If so many Frenchmen have accepted, willingly or not, the Vichy government, or have even made it a test of their generosity to cooperate with it, it is because, convinced that the present has nothing better to offer, they are thinking only of the work of salvage

to be done. They are hastening to alleviate the most crying need, "the future will take care of itself." And in fact, things being what they are, France is reduced to the point where her sole hope for new life centres on an old man of eighty-five years torn by the contradictory postulates of a policy of national "independence" and of "collaboration" with the enemy. Such a situation is reflected in the amazing political confusion presented by the French officials now in charge, high and low. Parlour or Academy "realists" reaping at last their reward, politicians and businessmen aspiring to a species of Bonapartist fascism and a totalitarian Europe, mingle helter-skelter with monarchists, socialists, repentant labourites, Catholics, liberals, men who detest totalitarianism and have devoted their lives to social justice, youths motivated by a strong spirit of devotion and brotherhood, and shifts of stolid and silent workers. Unfortunately, contemporary history affords precedents that point to what may be the outcome of such a chaotic jumble of good intentions unless the deeper sources of national vitality can recuperate before it is too late.

(A similar analysis would show that in the bitterness against England that prevailed in France at the time of the armistice, dire circumstances put into play the good as well as the evil. The brutal truth is that the French felt deserted in the midst of their disaster; that in such an urgency people do not pause to reflect on causes, to ratiocinate on how to allot responsibilities, to realize that the tardiness and deficiency of British aid were due to a faulty reasoning in which both countries shared.¹ Actually, both the British and the French high command could with equal justice exchange bitter reproaches. The fact remains that France had to fall to bring the British to their feet, at last; that while French defenses were cracking, the British army, despite the work accomplished by the R.A.F., seemed to think exclusively of England. People upon whom such an experience is inflicted, have some right to complain.)

On the other hand it seems, if our information is correct, that in the tragic days of June, 1940 the French were kept in ignorance of the British Prime

¹ The French general staff asked England for only thirty-two divisions for the duration of the war. In 1918 there were eighty five British divisions cooperating with the French army.

Minister's proposal to unite the two Empires, or knew too little about it to realize its significance. We may add that the French have little sense of empire, the word itself being foreign to their basic vocabulary. They know their soil and their fatherland, but are only dimly aware of the French Empire. Deplorably uninformed on the subject, the average Frenchman has little idea of the immense resources and power for which the French Empire stands.

(Finally, the French resented the errors of British policy; they remembered that since 1918, Britain had constantly overlooked France's need for tokens of security in regard to Germany.² The oft repeated saying, ironical in form and bitter in substance, "The French Republic is ruled by the King of England," chafed them; the triumphant reception given by Paris to the British sovereigns in 1938 shows that the idea of alliance and friendship between the two countries (as between two adult persons) could still stir the French to enthusiasm.

² The errors and lapses of the British policy of revision and those of the French adherence to the *status quo* in international affairs resulted only in making matters worse. Cf. Arnold Wolfers, *Britain and France between Two Wars*, 1940.

But they felt too keenly that they were embarked on a weak State taken in tow by a strong one, and they dimly understood that British conservatism (even more perhaps than French conservatism) hampered the indispensable work of general social and political refection that alone could save all from sinking.) When both countries became partners in a just war, such impressions were forgotten. In any case if the French people went into the war without qualms, it would not have been surprised to learn that its leaders at least had hesitated (and whoever knew the true state of our armament could well hesitate) and that the official decision to fight had come from England.

Right instincts and a correct sense of political realities were at work, but military disaster, with the aid of those partisans of a reversal of alliances, some of whom then occupied high positions, caused these same instincts to operate blindly. At this juncture, the campaigns waged unremittingly by part of the press — joined by the clamours of other newly converted papers — swelled by a tireless flow of German propaganda whose formulae, while repelled by reason, hid in

the subconscious, were bearing at last their fruits. The speaker of Stuttgart, at present in Paris, cannot in truth boast of having won the war. Yet certain releases made by the Vichy government and its press in the days following the armistice, may well have given him some illusions as to his claim of having won the heads of the state by his persuasive eloquence.

All tends to show that following the armistice and the wave of anti-English feeling it entailed, a reversal of public opinion has taken place in France, and that it is still growing. Contact with the Germans, their extortions and depredations on the one hand, and the heroic resistance of England on the other, have been the main factors in this change. The French population, surprised at first to see that German soldiers were men like any others, knows now by experience what Hitler's Germany really is. Many Frenchmen, who had perhaps believed that "the English would fight to the last Frenchman," now see them ready to fight to the last Englishman; they must be sick at heart as they stand on the sidelines of a fight in which they would have considered it an honour to take part.) American cor-

respondents have reported with what applause news-reels showing the destruction wrought in Germany by the R.A.F., are received in Paris; they have also written of the stoicism of the population of northern France, willingly resigned to British airplane raids because they are aimed at the Germans. The French refuse instinctively to look at the Germans they meet, their unseeing gaze passes through them as though they did not even exist. Just as they put their hope in America, the great mass of Frenchmen prays for an English victory, and knows that deliverance must come from them. Thus it appears probable that new ties are being forged in pain and humiliation, and that they will prove stronger than the old, rooted as they will be in the heart of the people.

* * *

The break of Franco-British friendship is not only a misfortune of vast consequences as concerns the present war; if it were to last, it would mean a catastrophe for both civilization and freedom. Once Germany is beaten, many things, that were impossible under the old structures of a politico-social

régime based on egotism and greed, will become possible. New conditions will even give an opportunity of putting into practice the historical ideal of a federation of free peoples. As regards the present war, no one can predict what surprising ebbs and flows it may bring. England realizes that it would be a grave mistake not to keep her confidence in the resources of the French people — I say *the people* of France — that it is worth trying not to alienate them.} The Oran incident was thus a moral calamity, made worse by the fact that the French public was never fully informed of the terms of the English ultimatum.

As concerns the blockade and the shipping of food to France, the problem cannot be solved by purely technical considerations. It is obvious that what France and all oppressed nations wish first from Great Britain is their deliverance and the defeat of Germany. This crucial need, however, does not mean that there are no other needs as well. It is clearly to England's own interests, that no food be sent, unless she receives an effective guarantee that the Germans will not seize such vital cargo, and that its indirect effect on German sustenance will remain

immaterial. The French, who witness the looting of their country at close range, know better than anyone else how difficult it is to assure such guarantees. But the blockade of war materials takes precedence over the food blockade; with its effectiveness weakened in some measure by the supplies of Central Europe and Russia which are for a time at the disposal of the Reich, England's interest would not be to place an absolute unconditional veto upon the provisioning of France and the various other countries dominated by Germany (especially those supplies needed for the feeding of children) — with the result that these countries would endure privations worse than those suffered by the Germans.³ If races which suffer at present for having loved liberty should perish, and their children die of hunger, it would harm both England and the world. In the last war, similar problems arose with regard to allied prisoners when the food sent them by their families meant an indirect leakage through the otherwise

³ This question of the feeding of peoples, victims of Germany, must be considered in itself, apart from the attempts which might be made by some to connect it with a certain particular policy. Those who link the question to a policy of appeasement and to a mentality of appeasers are in the surest manner making that question insolvable, and render the worst service to the famished.

successful blockade of Germany. The problem was rightly solved by obeying humanitarian considerations. A blockade is a more complex weapon to handle than a shell or a machine gun. In using it, one must take into account more varied considerations. It would be better if the use of the blockade could spare the living roots even of the enemy people and avoid starving their children. In any case, the threat of France going hungry is undoubtedly one of the instruments of blackmail used by the Germans on the Vichy government.

* * *

The questions raised today by the war and by Franco-British relations are so pregnant as to make it imperative for each one of us to clarify his position in their regard. (I, for one, think that the essential task of Frenchmen in this country is not only to do their utmost to keep alive in the world the spiritual heritage of France and her traditions of liberty — if the fortunes of life and American hospitality give them freedom to speak the truth, it is for them to speak the truth freely — but also to make ready, in their own small sphere, for the rebirth which is

bound to take place in France when Nazism is wiped from the face of the earth; to safeguard at least within themselves the independence of their country, and to keep open the channels for renewed exchange and collaboration that may at any time arise between France and England. To render valid this attitude, those in France must be made aware that their problems and state of mind are understood by their compatriots abroad.

Physically separated from the tragic experience that is the lot of their countrymen yesterday, today and tomorrow, they anxiously wish to make compensation by understanding France's suffering in an unrelenting agony of the heart. Distance does not weaken the sense of national solidarity but increases it, kindling in the French abroad an unrelenting anguish, unfurling a pall of desolate darkness. Come what may, I know that nothing can separate me from an absolute communion with the people of France; by saying here what they are forbidden to say in France, I uphold the very rights of this people which is my own, and in so doing our communion is strengthened.

Given an existing situation and circumstances as

tragic as those that reign in France today, it is a sound doctrine that duty towards the commonweal and a desire not to aggravate the common misfortune require legal respect for a government *de facto* (however severely it may be judged) except in such things as are forbidden by conscience. There are circumstances where discernment concerning such things becomes difficult and singularly painful, especially when the question that our conscience raises, and that each must solve according to his informed convictions and his own particular case, involves the very fate of the fatherland. It may be said here that on a question that divides the French today, a certain basic agreement nevertheless exists. It is senseless to contrast, as some here do, political obedience to De Gaulle and political obedience to Vichy, inasmuch as General De Gaulle has not set up a government in exile. He has gathered together a number of officers and soldiers bent on continuing the war, and does his best to keep side by side with England all that can be mustered from the French Empire. To work to this end, he has resigned himself to a break with the French government. (I think that deep down in their hearts, most

Frenchmen would like to be able to substitute for the idea of a break, that of a division of labor; at any rate all those who are living in this country, whatever may be their attitude toward De Gaullist organizations, at one and the same time put their hopes in those men who carry on the war to vindicate French honour, while they intend to maintain intact, to their best ability, their ties with the people of France and their solidarity. I have friends among those fighting with De Gaulle, and friends among those who in France are trying not to die of German asphyxiation (some of them are cooperating with government services), and I know that in spite of everything they stand together. De Gaulle's initiative has lifted a weight from many a conscience; in the widespread political debacle he has acted like a man, and his deeds may be of paramount importance in the course of events. And yet after all, our surest hope is not to be placed in one man, but rather in the people of our nation.

It is my contention that those here who contribute supplies with patriotic selflessness for De Gaulle's military venture, should also realize that judgment of the events of June, 1940 belongs to the past,

and that the France of today, caught in a trap and yet bent on living within the trap, must be protected from the distortions of German propaganda; they must realize that the upswing of the virtues of the French nation, and the muffled struggle between them and the Nazi domination are still the matter of essential importance. Furthermore, supposing that General De Gaulle had failed to take the initiative, that no committee of free Frenchmen had been formed, the political problems laid before the French conscience would remain substantially the same. Finally, to realize that a complete victory for England is a sovereign factor in our deliverance and to give what help we can to the British fighting effort, does not mean that we are unconditionally bound to England. If the misfortunes of war — may God forbid — should force Great Britain to a compromised peace, new questions would arise for France and for the world, new duties would loom up for the French, and perhaps it would take the strength and the decision of another people on another continent to continue the fight for civilization.

I remarked before that the French people were *politically* demoralized but that they were not *morally* demoralized. Considered in itself, such a mood is a perfect breeding ground for fascist growth. It is the situation that confronted the Italian people, the majority of whom disliked fascism; yet, they allowed this régime to take root, and they have by now no alternative but to bow to it. A weariness of politics has always been made capital of by political *condottieri*.

In France that weariness was extreme, and has surely grown more acute by now. Yet there is a distinction to be made in this parallel between France and Italy. Though the Italian mind has an innate grasp of politics, the Italian people has but little actual political experience, having arrived too late at political autonomy; while the reverse is true of the French, retching from an excess of political experience.

The main reason for this disgust lies with politics which brought to completion those illusions and errors bred by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the anarchical-bourgeois tenets and social materialism that concurred in vitiating from within the democratic prin-

ciple. The French carried this experiment farther than other people, to a point where they — whose political genius and political virtues have moulded an unmatched history stamped with such creative genius as to be the hope of the world — have become sick at heart of all political thought and even of democracy. Their state of mind may be mostly summed up as follows: “No politics! Stop this nonsense! We’re fed up with all that. Better to concentrate on such elementary tasks as assure us of a living.” We could query, “But *what* kind of a living?” And this would already be a political question. The word politics has sunk so low that it only stands for partisan spiels; and yet it is as difficult to escape political thought in the practical order as it is not to philosophize in the speculative order; and political skepticism is as barren as is skepticism in the philosophical or the religious realm.

Viewed along the vistas that a concrete dialectic of history opens, it can be said that totalitarian dictatorship is the fateful consequence as well as the destruction of this kind of democracy (or this mask of democracy) where a numerical majority not only

designates the leaders, but becomes the norm that states good from evil, and supersedes justice itself. In point of fact, however, totalitarian dictatorships have up to now succeeded only among nations which had never truly tested democracy; the reason is, doubtless, that in other nations the genuine democratic principle exists side by side with its counterfeit, and opposes obscurely the forces of disintegration. Accordingly, if some particular kind of fascism did take root in France, the scope of this political disaster would be infinitely greater than that of Russian, Italian, German or Spanish totalitarianism.

The French people will never take to fascism, they have too much commonsense, too many *real* roots in existence. But this very fact is far from sufficing to reassure us; for we know how the freedom of a people can buckle up under the impact of brute force mechanized, when a super-police and gigantic means of constraint give a handful of men who stop at nothing the power to enslave a country beyond recall. If a fascist régime were established in France, French logic would make it different from, and perhaps less stupid than other European fascisms, but it would be no less hard or less in-

tolerable. From what took place in France during the first four months of occupation, it appears, as will be shown later, that those closer to its soil are more reluctant now to accept a fascist régime than at the time of the armistice. In any case, the hypothesis of a France become fascist presupposes as its *sine qua non* a Nazi peace forced on Europe by a conclusive German victory. 'Franco-German collaboration for the reconstruction of peace in Europe' is a road toward slavery; it is only a road as yet, and unforeseen accidents can happen on the way. The problem of Franco-German cooperation is indeed a crucial European problem. If it is ever to be solved, it can be solved only between a Germany liberated from Nazism, Prussianism and imperialistic dreams, and a France cleansed of the moral defeatism of its skeptics and the conservatism of its pseudo-Cartesians.

* * *

This book opened with the statement that, pondering on the present French disaster, we come to believe that all causes of doom converged towards the same abyss when something located deep underground

gave way. What sank thus were the long-tottering structures of the French bourgeoisie. The French bourgeoisie crumbled as a class. It is obvious that it still includes individual elements of sterling value, intelligent, strong and upright personalities, in greater proportion perhaps than thirty years ago, especially among young people. If a political resurgence of France is soon to take place, these will play a major rôle; but as a class they are henceforth scattered like dust. The social portent that the door is forever closed on the nineteenth century is that its bourgeois class and bourgeois privileges are done for.

There are profound metaphysical reasons which explain the cleavage I indicated in the French conscience, which cause a people to be enraged with politics, to be politically demoralized, while at the same time retaining its natural morality and all its natural virtues. Politics is of itself a moral matter — and yet for nearly a century, since the triumph of Hegelianism and positivism, it has been rent from morality, not only through the inherent weaknesses of human performance which are always present, but moreover in right, through an absolute doctrinal

belief. Machiavelli himself would pale at the sight of modern Machiavellianism; clear-sighted and intelligent as he was, he could consider himself only as a cynic operating on the given moral basis of civilized tradition, and whose cruel work of exposure took for granted the coherence and density of this deep-rooted moral tradition. This needed background, this resisting substance upon which to operate, is now missing; there remains only a monstrous contraption, an empty and destructive technique, implacably intent, in the service of sordid interests or titanic dreams, to bring about the misfortune of men. And this is called political realism. No wonder that in the secret workings of its conscience, a people as clear-sighted as the French and possessed of as keen a political instinct, was led little by little because of this unnatural separation of politics and morality to a sharp distaste for politics. The consequent political demoralization was all the more acute since the natural morality and the natural virtues remained awake, and the people retreated into these in their deep scorn for the gloomy performance offered by the leaders of nations. The cleavage in the depths of the French conscience is

but a result and a sign within modern life of the schism that Machiavellianism brought about within modern thought.

The intellectual leaders of the French bourgeoisie of today accepted this schism as a sure doctrine. One of them, who wrote thirty years ago a book on Machiavellianism, notes with admiration that "Machiavelli points imperturbably to the chasm between politics and morality." To quote further: "Machiavelli," he says, "takes for granted that morality is one thing, that politics is another. Nowhere does he opine that such a state of affairs is right, he contents himself with a statement of fact. . . Some means are good, some are bad, some are moral and some immoral; but Machiavellianism either ignores or forgets this; it deems means as neither good nor bad, nor moral or immoral; they succeed or they fail; they are bad if they fail and if they do succeed they are no longer immoral, or this point is by then irrelevant." And again, alluding to Cavour and Bismarck, the same author writes: "Twice have we heard, across the Alps and beyond the Rhine, the ringing call which brings people to resurgence, and twice at this call

have we seen arise, as if awakened from the sleep of the earth, the man who was fated to come. Both times this man was the prince, as Machiavelli had seen him: great in dissembling and great in pretending, past master of opportunity, teamed now with Providence, now a bold seducer of Fortune, enamoured of snares, great worshipper of power, both a lion and a fox, at times more lion than fox, at others more fox than lion.”⁴ The author I quote could add to the picture he paints in words, new foxes and new tigers, princes of nothingness sprung forth from the sleep of the earth. If these lines seem today prophetic, it is because the thought from which they proceed flowed along the current of that corruption of politics which produces today its finest result. Mr. Charles Benoist is a good example of those genteel Machiavellians among the French bourgeoisie, those unfortunates that toyed with Machiavellian thought but lacked Machiavellianism in their blood. They missed the rise of the terrible countenance of total Machiavellianism, of Machiavellianism gone mad, triumphant over their reasonable Machiavellianism, and, for the ad-

⁴ Charles Benoist, *Le Machiavélisme*, t. I, pages 1-12.

vantage of the most inhuman and pitiless of revolutions, making game of their worship of an order without justice.

* * *

Political virtues and the political experience of a people are not uprooted easily; those of the French seem today to slumber in hibernation. The period of political demoralization through which they are now passing does not imply that these virtues are dead, as the following facts attest.

Kept from public expression, the reactions and feelings of the French masses happen only in the realm of individual behavior. What we learn from private sources concerning these reactions and feelings projects a pinpoint gleam of light into our night. We are told that the feelings of the country are thoroughly dissociated from the domesticated press and a radio controlled directly by Germany. The so-called French radio sickens the French. The official ideology does not take hold on most of them; they understand conditions. The measures taken by the Vichy government under Nazi pressure inspire feelings that range from frank aversion to deep

uneasiness; moreover government employees who administer those measures have so little pride in them that they treat their official victims with some compensative private benevolence. It has even been noted that the grim stage set at Vichy — official utterances, the rottenness of most newspapers, the debased radio — contrasts with a kind of good nature on the part of the officials concerned. Mr. Doriot aspires in vain in Marseilles to the laurels of Herr Julius Streicher; his anti-Semitic propaganda falls flat. Doubtless anti-Semitism sickens everything it touches with a principle of spiritual disorder, and the reading of the wretched weeklies that have been and still are more than ever the main agents of corrupting opinion, fills the minds of many with ready-made formulae, an ideological coin of the worst alloy. But this mental counterfeit leaves most hearts unharmed. Anti-Semitic laws, being German importations, disgust the people all the more. There exist small groups openly pro-Nazi, but they are the object of general disavowal. I have already spoken of the aversion that exists among the population towards these same Germans with whom the government leaders feel themselves obliged to

reconstruct the peace of Europe. A major part of public opinion is resigned to the idea of a régime of force, but nowhere up to now among the French people has there been a genuine upsurge of those instincts of arrogance and of cruelty that fascism must cultivate among certain fanatical "élite" to help it take hold of a country. Finally, and what is more important, all testimonies point to a general upswing in the quasi-atomic order of individual lives. In this near past of distress, each person in France has reacted against misfortune on his own, surmounting it by fortitude. When all these — strength of soul, freedom of personal judgment, the individual working of consciences — overcome misfortune, and breed a true anxiety for the fate of the community, the prospects for the spadework that must herald the coming of a totalitarian party are remote. These qualities, doubtless, do not as yet constitute political virtues, but they may be accepted as the moral precondition that ushers in such virtues.

It hurts to think that at the moment when a spiritual reawakening governs the atomic life of the nation, economic and political cooperation with Ger-

man totalitarianism is about to launch a new assault manned by the forces of error, unless such collaboration remains a stage set for the exchange of official formulae and the bargainings incident to immediate arrangements of no general import but of tragic urgency — those concerning the 1,800,000 prisoners detained in Germany, or the problems of communication between occupied and unoccupied territories. Releasing drop by drop the “concessions” dictated by their unselfish friendship, the Nazis doubtless plan to use their instruments of pressure and blackmail with maximum harshness and cleverness. France will resist as best she can. Who could witness without being filled with respect and pity, this atrocious struggle, waged cautiously and tenaciously, with the victim writhing in the headsman’s “friendly” embrace.

It is to be feared that certain persons will take advantage of the physical relief afforded or promised as a result of the agreements of October–November, 1940, to extoll to the French the benefits of vassalage and to spread among them the miasma of resignation to historical fatalities and those mists of illusions which foster all the wiles of friendly

Nazification. Once again, the natural desire to resume one's life and work, the longing for a new normalcy, for tasks accomplished in common, run the risk of being exploited by lies, and of resulting in the acceptance by a number of people of the very worst counterfeits; totalitarian revolution disguised as European order may lead many young people astray. This new experience would nevertheless be to the French as unbearable and instructive as is the German occupation. In this growing tragedy, will the moral dispositions now awakened in the mass of the people play a rôle? As yet they are brittle, altogether disarmed, powerless to spur a move of open resistance that would, as a matter of fact, be doomed to failure while the German armies police the land. And yet the voiceless indignation of public opinion faced with a German peace must have influenced the tenor of the agreements already mentioned; however disarmed they may have been, the feelings of the people, by strengthening the purpose of those leaders who refused to bow to Hitler's designs, by impeding the course of those who had planned a full acquiescence, managed to avoid the worst. The heavy responsibilities that

Marshal Pétain took upon himself as chief of state several months ago concentrate on his person such national hopes as to challenge the best in him. Can he avoid the new moral capitulations that Germany plans to exact? Will he be able to master the contradictions inherent in the policy in which he has involved the country? Some day may a refusal to surrender the fleet or to allow the empire to be carved, impose upon him a supreme heroic decision? Or will France, in this new phase of her sufferings, be thrown into an unheard of contradiction, with its official policy seceding more and more from popular feeling, with an officialdom increasingly zealous to cooperate with the victor, while the people, at last fully conscious of the rape of their country, will hate increasingly the Nazi yoke? Whichever it may be, a deeper and more hidden pattern is being woven, brought nearer completion with each individual recovery; this atomic fermentation will in the end modify the whole nation, and suggests that in darkness and in solitude, the political virtues of the French people gather in seeming slumber strength enough for recovery. The war over and Germany

beaten, I feel sure that those virtues will prove their full stature as freedom is reconquered.

But the undergone purification will have been thorough, and what terrible ordeals are still to come? The French people, especially its bourgeois and intellectual elements, have become in the recent years coldly realistic, suspicious of feeling and of imagination, immune to ideas, allergic to hope, resolved to test exactly all that comes their way. This attitude contains at once something excellent and something disappointing, and will probably entrench itself all the more as each new suffering and upheaval hardens further the people's heart to shield it against despair. But before the French can recover their political genius, the springs of goodness and generosity which are also theirs must impregnate their intelligence, the moral experience in which they are so rich must fertilize their reason with higher and more universal truths. The French people will have to discard for good the so-called political realism that is so alien and so inimical to its own essence, it must proclaim to the world that the doings of Machiavellianism are over. ' For

the triumph of Machiavellianism implies his death sentence. The same men who, after the previous war, denied that a vanquished and humbled Germany could still contain seeds of human hope, banked on her despair, derided every attempt at collaboration, who bitterly criticized Benedict XV and Aristide Briand — these same men accept to-day, some in bitterness and sorrow, others willingly, still others with some sort of pleasure and hope, a collaboration with a totalitarian Germany drunk with power, possessed by the demons of her ancient paganism, and ready to destroy all to enslave all. This harsh lesson must not be lost. Machiavellianism is condemned in the conscience of nations. Total Machiavellianism has destroyed temperate Machiavellianism, and in turn if absolute Machiavellianism is not destroyed by justice, then death will destroy it, the same death which it has spread over the universe and which is stronger than itself.

French political genius needs Christianity. I believe that it cannot truly flourish unless the Gospel leaven permeates it. Before the present war the religious renaissance in France was strong in the spiritual order, but touched only the fringe of

a political renewal, and that in the domain of thought only. The sad fact is that the French Catholic revival remained only a potential force in the political order, its action in this order having remained deplorably weak. Perhaps after the war, inspired as this movement was by the grace of the Gospel, strengthened by the ordeal and brought closer to the work of men, it will acquire then political knowledge and power. Never before in the history of France have darker circumstances demanded more intelligent good will. Perhaps French political virtues will be restored in the only real realism, that of the Incarnation, and in them mankind will learn to taste temporal communion in liberty. Perhaps we shall witness the beginnings of Christian politics. Christian politics is neither theocratic nor clerical, nor yet a politics of pseudo-evangelical weakness and non-resistance to evil, but a genuinely political politics, ever aware that it is situated in the order of nature and must put into practice natural virtues; that it must be armed with real and concrete justice, with force, perspicacity and prudence; a politics which would hold the sword that is the attribute of the state, but which would also realize that

peace is the work not only of justice but of love. And it must be mindful of the eternal destiny of man and of the Gospel's truths, knowing in its proper order — in a measure adapted to its temporal ends — something of the Spirit, of love, and of forgiveness.

VII

THROUGH THE DISASTER

Fearful of being 'duped once more' the French soldiers distinguished this war from the last "war to end war" by dubbing it "the last before the next" or "the first of those that follow." They were perhaps better prophets than their elders; as far as the philosophy of modern history allows conjecture, the forecast is not promising, at least for a time. If it be true that the present war is but a phase of the liquidation of what Péguy calls the modern world, roughly speaking a four-century block of history, one moment of agony, shattering as it may be, is not enough to wind up the tale. The catastrophe that brands our age is mainly due to the discovery that the Machine can be diverted from its task of mastering nature to the mastering of humanity itself, of man as matter. Thus a handful of men, with absolute scorn for moral law and with absolute cruelty, can make themselves supermen and work their will on the rest of the world. The

human conscience teamed with the effort of creative energies, will work to put an end to this tragedy, but will it be able to make again the Machine a positive force in the service of mankind — to impose on man's instinctive greed with its unsurpassable technical equipment, a collective reason grown stronger than instinct — without a period of trial and error more terrible to our kind than the prehistoric eras.

When at the start of this war we wrote that Europe was already saved, we had some slight intuition, but we had not begun actually to realize what we would have to go through before this came to be. It was obvious that a thorough clean-up was in order, that the petrified moral and politico-social structures that blocked the path of history would be hard to dislodge. We witness now but the start of their fall. Human reason must steel itself to contemplate wholesale ruins and upheavals beyond imagination which have still to take place, to make for a needed and radical rebirth on both the spiritual and the temporal plane. *Deposuit potentes de sede.* The justice of God must indeed come to pass; the Apocalypse is only beginning. We may foresee that the liquidation of which the present war is but

an episode will proceed by steps, perhaps with lulls wonderful to be had, but short-lived, until the time marked by Paul the Apostle for what he calls a resurrection from the dead. Meanwhile those who refuse to worship the beast will have had to huddle in the catacombs of history and to devise hitherto untried ways of holding their own against evil.

From such perspectives I look on my people in its present trial. A people humiliated, a people strangely forsaken. I know that the Polish people, tortured incredibly by a sadism both fiendish and disciplined, are even more forsaken. I know that the Jews are more forsaken. But the abandonment experienced by the French people has more paradoxical and, in a sense, graver overtones. I mentioned before that in France today there is everywhere an immense effort of good will; in spite of it the French people finds itself morally forsaken. At the crucial moment it has been forsaken by its natural leaders (I do not speak of its bishops), by its ruling classes, by the official guardians of its tradition, by a great many of its intellectuals — an abandonment caused less by ill will than by weakness and illusion (for they thought they were serving

their country in their own way) in a process of self-collapse. All the evil power of the enemy is bent on destroying its soul, worming its way into its depths, attacking its very heart. [Nazism does not only want to reduce the French to physical impotence and disorganization, it is the very spirit of France that Nazism detests, it is the soul of France that it aims to corrupt. All means are good to keep France on a leash. Against such a darkening tornado, how impotent a dike built of paper laws and the fancies of political "realism."

Meanwhile the people does not relax, it works. It bends over the soil, its soil, and it labours. It will not be easily tamed. Reduced to utter helplessness, forced to bear the worst humiliations, it slowly resumes contact, amidst its very helplessness, with the strength dormant in its roots.]

We know that, in this very loneliness, with no hope but in its own laborious poverty, pared to the naked flesh, the French people deserves more than ever our deep-rooted trust. More than ever we believe in its vocation, and perceive that the world needs it in the crucial age we have entered.

I say this not to boast of my own, but for the

sake of truth at a time when calumny assails them; this people was, and is still, the most civilized, tolerant, hospitable, peaceful, industrious and generous in the works of the mind, the most spiritualized in spite of its failings, the most Christian without boast, the closest to the soil and to reality, the richest in inner resources, the most able to profit from misfortune and to scoff at false gods. Do you think that desolation and abandonment, propaganda and the Gestapo can wipe out these things on short notice! The situation parallels the distress brought about by the treaty of Troyes and the Hundred Years War. Then the French conquered as drastic a loneliness. In the sixteenth century they digested and surmounted their religious wars, and later on their own Revolution. I know that if Nazi domination should become established over Europe, and the German peace bear down permanently on France, her servitude would not be short-lived. She might perhaps succeed, after a century or two, in digesting and slowly transforming, and in the end in surmounting this state of slavery; but for the coming historical period which promises to be of paramount importance to humanity, she would find herself unable

to enlighten and vivify. Thus France and her vocation would be practically at an end, at least for a great while. For this reason, and because I have faith in her vocation, I profess that in the end and in spite of all possible misfortunes, the Nazi empire and its German peace will not be imposed on Europe and on France, that the next phase of the vast revolution upon which Europe is launched, will not usher in the triumph but rather the bankruptcy of the totalitarian dictatorships.

Hitler's Germany has counted everywhere on dissolving forces, on the endless reserves of evil, on the weakness of human conscience. These may become the very means with which she will be struck down. Régimes built on mechanical discipline thwart the growth of man's inner powers. If the legions of the Führer meet with reverses, his power may of a sudden crumble, as the souls of this German people which he deems his breakdown.

Meanwhile the world is in such turmoil that anything may happen, that anything may follow. Perhaps the slow recovery of political virtues by the French people may, in spite of their distress, bring a pressure from within on their leaders to cleanse

their policies, to guide again the country as best chance offers along its true path. Perhaps a peculiar compassion of God may be hidden in the darkness of our nightmare, aiming to extract good from bad and to upset human plans. Has God decreed that the French holocaust of 1914-1918 was enough, has He wished to spare at least the potentialities of our race? If they further their recovery, it may perhaps be that when all nations are in the supreme trial and fight for the supreme decision, the French will be robust enough to act true to their historical vocation.

It may also well be that our miseries will continue, that misfortune will deepen, that we will reach new depths of humiliation. It may be that the process of liquidation will go on until at last — but when, Lord, and from what depths — the souls upon whom Thy hand weighs heavier than a world hear Thy humble voice in the secret of their being, until from the vital recesses of the very substance of mankind a new spring will burgeon forth. Our age is such as to call all causes from all points of the globe to be delivered pitilessly of their effects; everything that is hidden will be dragged

into the open, the principles of death will unleash their energy and open into monstrous sores. Such a total outpour of evil has its hope, for evil is after all finite. That very fact may be our last hope, and the last hope is rock strong.

* * *

I belong to a people in whom temporal hope is so deeply rooted that it seems to be of their substance. [What I wrote in June, 1940 can be repeated to close this book. France has indestructible faith in her vocation; you can flay a Frenchman alive but you cannot take away this faith. It is not for sure a theological faith; this natural trust in France does not proceed from faith, the supernatural virtue, and yet it has some indirect connection with it. Pope Pius X knew this when he promised that France would undergo resurrection in terms which I will quote here: "Her sins will not remain unpunished, but she will not perish, the daughter of so many merits, so many sighs and so many tears." And comparing France to Saul on the road to Damascus, Pius X foretold that a day

would come when, having chastised her, the Lord would lift her up and say: "Go, first-born daughter of the Church, chosen nation, vase of election, go carry, as in the past, My Name before all peoples and kings of the earth."

The Virgin has appeared on French soil more often than in any other country. France has as its active symbol and temporal sacrament a saint unmatched elsewhere: those Catholics who judge France with arrogance or disdain, and often nurture a notion of religion that is more political than evangelical, could well stop and ponder on this point. Joan of Arc was a daughter of the people; Joan of Arc proved docile to the voice of saints; Joan of Arc went to war to save a kingdom which she expressly asked her king to donate to the King of Heaven; Joan of Arc was convicted as heretic and relapsed heretic by priests-politicians; Joan of Arc appealed to the Pope — who was "too far away" as her judges remarked; Joan of Arc called on the Church triumphant as her witness and never did put in doubt the Church militant. And after she was burned to ashes and her virginal heart was cast into

the Seine, the Church militant rehabilitated her; and when the heinous threats of our age closed up on France, the Church militant canonized her.

Promises *without repentance* do not only concern the Kingdom of God, but also exist in relation to civilization on earth and to temporal vocations. The particular promise in which we trust is inscribed in the spiritual experience of France and confirmed in her history.

POST-SCRIPTUM

Since the writing of these pages, Greece has driven back Fascist invaders, Italy has lost East Africa. Germany has launched a dangerous maritime war and counter-blockade and threatened Egypt. The Lease-Lend Bill has been voted and the United States is increasing its powerful industrial output for an all-out aid to England. On Palm Sunday, 1941, German armies moved against Greece and Yugoslavia. France has experienced more and more distress and misery: lack of fuel during a severely cold winter; lack of food for the poor and for children in the large cities; lack of means for recourse against the draining of her vital resources by her ravenous conqueror and "cooperator." M. Pierre Laval has been diverted, together with his plots, as being a too impatient heir-apparent. But the German pressure in the matter of the French fleet and the African bases has not ceased to darken the future. The policy of economic and industrial collaboration with the Axis has been confirmed. The anti-Semitic decrees have not spared even those Jews who were wounded in the service of their country during this war or the previous war. The official ideology increasingly resembles a paternalist autocracy. The sufferings, anguish, humiliation, the impending menace of starvation, the Nazi plunder, have become more and more serious in France. But the people have one hope: liberation — the victory of England and America over the enemy. They realize clearly their present predicament. They understand more deeply and they do not despair. The French people are in a state of silent concentration on all of their energies, physical and moral. They are enduring many things which they know are not eternal. Immobile and voiceless in their dark night, they remain awake — and wait for the day of resurgence and liberty.

April 7, 1941

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